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WHY NOT GREEK.

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BECAUSE A KNOWLEDGE OF CLASSICAL GREEK IS NECESSARY FOR UNDERSTANDING MODERN THOUGHT AND LITERATURE, IT SHOULD BE PART OF THE SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM. A PROBLEM IS GETTING TEACHERS OF GREEK, AND PROBABLY MOST OF THE TEACHING SHOULD BE DONE BY COLLEGE PROFESSORS WHO TEACH THE HIGHLY MOTIVATED STUDENTS IN THE HIGH SCHOOL. AN ELEMENTARY COURSE SHOULD BE ORGANIZED SO THAT THE STUDENT LEARNS GREEK ANALYTICALLY BY STUDYING NEW POINTS OF GRAMMAR ONLY AS THEY OCCUR IN THE LITERATURE HE READS. EVEN MORE IMPORTANT IS A "CULTURE COURSE" WITH LECTURES GIVEN BY TEACHERS FROM VARIOUS DEPARTMENTS, SUCH AS ART, HISTORY, AND PHILOSOPHY. GREEK MYTHOLOGY, GREEK RELIGION, GREEK LITERARY GENRES, AND GREEK SCIENCE AND MATHEMATICS ALL ARE MOST RELEVANT TO A STUDENT'S UNDERSTANDING OF "THE INTERRELATIONS AND UNITIES OF HIS OWN CULTURE BOTH IN SPACE AND TIME." SUCH A COURSE WOULD NOT NECESSITATE A KNOWLEDGE OF GREEK LANGUAGE. ALSO VALUABLE WOULD BE A COURSE IN GREEK (AND LATIN) ETYMOLOGY. FUNDAMENTALLY, HOWEVER, A COURSE IN GREEK THOUGHT AND LITERATURE WOULD SERVE TO EDUCATE A STUDENT RATHER THAN ONLY TRAIN HIM FOR A SPECIAL PROFESSION. THIS ARTICLE IS PUBLISHED IN "THE ARCH," VOLUME 13, NUMBER 2, WINTER ISSUE, 1966. (AS)

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Why Not Greek?

I The Greek Language in High School

During the summer of 1965 I had the exhilarating experience of teaching at the Governor's Honors Program in Macon, attended by the cream of Georgia's high school students. Although I was there primarily as a Latin teacher, certainly my greatest satisfaction came from an elementary course in Greek which I gave, at the suggestion of Miss Margaret O. Bynum, director of the program, twice a week in the afternoon. Admittedly I was skeptical about anyone's wishing to take it except a few of my Latin students from the morning classes, but, much to my surprise, over sixty students flocked to my tiny classroom the first day. (We were immediately given a large lecture hall.) This number was soon halved because of a schedule change, but the remainder, about thirty, stayed rather constant, despite there being no requirement to attend every class.

This response from the students, albeit very bright ones, has caused me to reflect a bit on the teaching of Greek and to ask, regarding the high school curriculum: . Why not Greek?

I am not, however, blindly optimistic nor shall I ignore several quite difficult obstacles hindering the introduction of Greek into the high schools. Assuming willingness on the part of administrations and faculties to attempt such a course, I shall restrict the discussion to those problems involved only in the teaching itself. Therefore, what are the steps necessary for establishing a course in Greek? Next, where would the teachers be found, since Greek teachers are not everywhere abundant? Then, what happens to Latin, which would most likely be the language in keenest competition with Greek? I shall try to answer these questions in reverse order.

Latin, to begin with, has at least one very solid advantage over Greek and even the Romance languages in that it provides for us English speakers the best foundation for further study in European languages. Thus, Latin is highly recommended as a first language because, so to speak, it lets the student of languages in on the ground floor. For this reason alone, leaving aside the pleasure and instruction that can be derived from Latin literature and Roman history, Latin ought to be firmly fixed in the

high school curriculum of today when the knowledge of one or more foreign languages is becoming imperative. Although Greek lacks this advantage of Latin, nevertheless Greek has one of really greater importance and one which, as a student grows more familiar with the language, increases in significance. The advantage is that there has been no thinking so fundamental, so universal, and so interestingly presented as that which was expressed by the Greeks in their remarkable language. The confidence which they felt in it was boundless, in spite of Socrates. The study of Greek culture through the Greek language, although immensely interesting in itself, is quite analogous for the understanding of modern thought and literature to the study of Latin for the understanding of modern languages. The understanding of culture, however, is on a far higher plane than mastering a language, since one can do the latter without attaining the former, but it is not so easy the other way around. Therefore, the value of teaching Greek, and with it Greek culture, seems to me incontestable, even at the possible expense of Latin.

But, who in the world is going to teach Greek in the high schools? I must admit that I can see no way for it to be taught on a very large scale immediately. The prospect of finding many Latin teachers who have studied some Greek is rather dismal since, I have been told, frequently French and Spanish teachers, who happen to have had a couple years of high school Latin, are impressed into teaching Latin. However, there are certainly a few teachers who could handle an elementary Greek class; and usually students, who are planning to teach Latin, are encouraged to take at least one year of Greek. Another source of teachers is the college classics departments. To be sure, few college teachers would jump at the opportunity to teach in high school, even a few hours a week. I should be willing to wager, though, that a Greek class in high school would be very much like mine in Macon at the Governor's Honors Program, that is, ideal. It would no doubt be made up of only the most highly motivated students, whose abilities can really never be fully challenged. The feeling of confidence one has in such students gives the teacher tremendous freedom to organize and present material without the worry that many are not understanding. Again, this particular type of student will respond as he is treated. If he realizes that his teacher regards him as mature or maturing, he will do his best to act accordingly. Add to this the fact that a high school student can still indulge his natural curiosity without the necessity of concern for immediate practicality, it becomes clear that one has the makings of the ideal student. Truly, the high school years are the twilight of the golden age of learning. I found this fact reflected in a statement of one of my Greek students at the G.H.P. when he remarked about his future college career: if only one could study Latin and Greek to one's heart's content and still pursue a profession in medicine and the natural sciences. I must point out to this brilliant young fellow and others like him, that the study of classics can be invaluable as a foundation for every other profession from teaching and the ministry to law and business,

and that it is not a bad supplement to the lop-sided diet of science courses required of future professional scientists and doctors. Also, it appears from advertisements in national magazines that business is seeking men and women who are educated, not merely trained. After all, who cannot be trained? Returning to the subject of finding teachers, I fear that in our case, as in many other areas, there is no comfortable solution for the lack of qualified teachers. It seems to me inevitable, if Greek is to be effectively taught in high school, that there must be close co-operation on the part of colleges with secondary schools, and the shouldering of much of the burden of teaching by the colleges.

Let us assume, for the following discussion, that there are teachers of Greek available. How does one go about setting up the course? If a teacher is conscientious and honest about being in a new situation, this problem is all but non-existent for there exists for the elementary level an excellent book, in my opinion, by Clyde Pharr, called Homeric Greek.[1] He himself argues persuasively enough in his Introduction for beginning Greek with Homer instead of, say, Plato. Aside from that, the book has other advantages over other elementary Greek books. One is that it has the student, practically from the beginning, reading one of the most influential books in European literature at a pace easy to maintain. I do not believe any other language does anything comparable since at least the first quarter or semester is spent merely in mastering grammar without literary context. Then, when continuous passages are begun, they are taken from works of little or no literary importance. Pharr, after a few preliminary lessons, moves right into the text of the Iliad. From then on, new points of grammar are presented as they occur in the poem. Since there is no compelling logic in the organization of grammar, this seems to me a far better and effective way to teach a language that must be learned analytically and not aural-orally. Another advantage is that the book is practically self-teaching. This would be especially beneficial for our circumstances, since very likely a teacher is not going to be too confident of his Greek. A teacher could easily base the course on this book and merely follow its lead.

This, then, is my idea of how a standard elementary Greek course could be handled, and it was reasonably successful in Macon, even though the class was rather informal. Courses beyond the elementary level can be based on readers specially designed for such courses in British schools. St. Martin's Press, for example, has a good catalogue of Greek and Latin texts.

II Greek Civilization in High School

There is yet another kind of course which can serve to communicate Greek thought and culture in general. This is the appropriately named "culture" course. Although a course of this kind is extremely valuable and is universally taught on college campuses, it is one of the most difficult to teach because, almost of necessity, it demands several teachers to handle the various aspects of civilization. Therefore, interdisciplinary cooperation is necessary. As in the case of Greek, it would probably be

quite a task to find willing and able teachers. However, if it were possible for teachers to approach the subject with an experimental attitude and to regard it as a profitable experience for themselves, I feel that many difficulties would disappear. In a course on Greek civilization, it would be possible, even necessary, for virtually every department, from mathematics to literature, to contribute. There would be no trouble, for example, for an art teacher, or anyone interested in the subject, to conduct a few classes on Greek and Roman art since there are available so many books with excellent photographs and several fine films. It would be good from time to time to give lectures on Greek history in order to give the students some perspective. Naturally, Greek literature and thought would make up the bulk of the course.

At the mention of these last two categories, a host of approaches come to mind. First, Greek mythology is always a sure winner with students, not only because it best expresses Greek religion and was the mainstay for theme and imagery in literature, but also because it is awfully interesting in itself. In turn, there is much light which Greek religion can shed on the practices and beliefs of the Judaeo-Christian religions. This sort of teaching of "religion" is one with which no one can constitutionally quarrel. Another approach is reading selected literary works for themselves. There are many books of this type around, but it seems that unless one chooses a particular genre, such as tragedy or philosophy, this approach is not too successful.

Another and very fruitful approach is the history of Greek science. Last summer in Macon I attempted such a course for which the Greek class was really just a complement. It was about twice as popular as the language course. Everyone is at least interested in science and how it works. Most of us would feel more akin and sympathetic with the Greeks who rose so high in their development of science, especially mathematics, without developing a very complicated technology. Present day technology seems to overwhelm us all and cause us to wonder about any importance of the human element. The Greeks, on the other hand, faced the world with the naked mind, unclothed and unprotected by the machine. Yet, what had been accomplished by them by 300 B.C. was not surpassed until 1500 A.D., which time witnessed both the rediscovery on a broad scale of Greek mathematics and the invention of the telescope. Using my own class as an example, I felt that the students profited greatly, in spite or because of the fact that I could not provide all of the answers. There were times when I simply had to turn the class over to one or two students to explain more clearly some problem, particularly in math, and the Greeks' solution. Even then we hardly touched upon what the Greeks really did in science or math since I chose developments that I thought I could understand. But someone trained in science and math could present a really profound course, infinitely better than mine. There are good books,[2] some in paperback, written by scientists and mathematicians on the Greeks, and, since the languages of these disciplines is universal, knowledge of Greek is seldom essential.

Before I leave this kind of course entirely, I might say that there is nothing to prevent the French, Spanish, German or English departments, whatever ones exist in any single school, from instituting similar courses. In fact, I believe that it would be wonderful for the curriculum in general to be centered around such courses. The preparation given to the student for college or any profession would be hard to overestimate. His opportunity to grasp the interrelations and unities of his own culture both in space and time would be unparalleled.

A final course about the Greeks (and Romans) which I wish to suggest is one on etymologies. This course has always proved to be immensely popular, inasmuch as this is truly a course which can improve English. Although this course may appear at first easy to teach, there is one major difficulty which comes to mind. There are no handy books on the subject. I may be wrong about that, but the only organized courses which I have seen have been made up by the teacher himself. However, the course has been offered in Georgia, at least at the University of Georgia, where material can possibly be got. I do not feel that I have to elaborate on this class since the advantages of a powerful vocabulary are manifest, and a course in etymologies from Greek and Latin is one of the most effective means to that end.

In conclusion, then, I should assert that Greek culture is not merely the culture of Greece but of us all, in language, literature, science, mathematics, philosophy, and, to a degree, religion. This is a most powerful argument, I believe, for introducing, if not Greek, then something Greek into the high school curriculum. The problems of the Greeks are our problems. It was a Greek who first looked at heaven and earth much as we do now, and tried to discover their nature, a thing we are still trying to do. Greeks developed a number world by which multifarious observations could be reduced to a mathematical formula. Greeks often observed man with the detachment of an anthropologist; they also became very emotionally involved. Since they generally believed that his nature was most clearly expressed in his political institutions, and was most easily controlled by them, the Greeks put forth so many ideas about government that any political thinker from Louis XIV to Marx wondered how much effect a man's character had upon his destiny. Thus, with this inexhaustible wealth of knowledge, observations, and speculations lying right at hand, ready-made, as it were, it seems to me dreadfully wrong for it to be ignored, at least until college, perhaps, for most individuals, forever. To my mind, the teaching of Greek and Greek culture is not designed for the aggrandizement of classics teachers nor merely to add another course to the curriculum. No, it is designed to immerse the mind of the student in, and to increase his awareness of his own world here and now.

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NOTES

1. Clyde Pharr, Homeric Greek, University of Oklahoma Press.
2. E.g. Archimedes, Geometrical Solutions Derived from Mechanics, Open Court Publishers; Hippocrates, Theory and Practice of Medicine, Citadel Press; B. Farrington, Greek Science, Penguin; G. di Santillana, Origins of Scientific Thought.